A PLEA

FOR

UNITED RESPONDING

IN THE

Public Worship of God.

BY THE

REV. J. F. HODGSON, M. A.,

Vicar of Horsham, Sussex, England.

"I speak as unto wise men; *judge ye* what I say."

TORONTO:

PRINTED BY ROWSELL & ELLIS.

1859.

A Plea for United Responding.

THERE is nothing more common in the present day than to hear people making complaints of the dulness of our English Church worship. These complaints are made not only by those who are "not of us," as by Romanists, Dissenters, and others,—but even by our own people,—even by those who wish to be devout and holy, but who, nevertheless, strive against it as they may, cannot help confessing to a certain weariness which *will* creep over them long before service is ended. They seem not to *delight* in the public worship of their GOD with that true joy of heart which should be, they are well aware, one of the chief characteristics of a Christian's worship, but attend upon it rather as a *positive duty* which it would be sinful to omit; but which, if they did *not* feel it a *duty*, they would not, from any delight they take in the thing itself, frequent.

Now the object of these pages is to discover, if possible, whether any *reasonable ground* exists for these complaints; and if

so, to suggest the means for its mitigation or removal.

No doubt part of the evil lies in the unchastened heart and affections of the worshipper ; and consequently, part of the remedy lies in himself, in the better preparation of his own heart ; and it may as well be observed once for all—That were we admitted to the choirs of the blessed angels themselves we must have chastened hearts and affections, or we should not enjoy the service or appreciate the privilege.

A portion, however, of the evil complained of *may* lie elsewhere ; that is, either *in the service itself*, which may be in its own nature unedifying and dull, or *in our mode of celebrating it*, which may be faulty and wearisome. Is there any thing in these or either of them calculated to chill rather than to foster the affections, to check rather than to promote the flow of religious emotions ? Is there any thing *needlessly* uninviting to those (unhappily too many) who are yet to be won over to take delight in the things of the Spirit ? It is not *the service itself* which is to blame ; even enemies allow that our *form* of worship is most edifying and beautiful, *entirely* calculated for *its* purpose. The fault

then, if any, must be in our mode of *celebrating it.*

Now in order that we may determine whether this is so or not, the question first has to be settled, How *ought* the service to be celebrated? Is there any rule or principle laid down to which we can refer? At present no rule seems to be practically recognised. The minister, in reading, pursues his own way, the clerk his, the children theirs, * the rest of the congregation theirs. The responses in most Churches, so far from affording an agreeable sound, are, without exaggeration, a jumble of discords. Is there then *no* rule on the subject by which a Christian congregation *ought* to be guided? There is indeed such a rule, and it is because we have, except to a very limited extent, lost sight of this, that fault must be found with our ordinary mode of *celebrating* the public worship of God. Hence it is that people complain of God's worship being heavy, and tedious, and dull. They are unconscious of the cause perhaps, and would be the very first, possibly, to quarrel with the remedy about to be proposed, but however this may

* The children here referred to mean those of the Parish School, who form a feature in every English Parish Church Congregation.

be, the secret *why* our service appears dull and uninviting to so many is (beyond all doubt) because the service is so generally performed in defiance of those principles which nature and reason jointly inculcate, and which have been recognised in the most express terms by public authority. For where any thing is done in such a way as to contravene principles founded in nature and reason, it is not in man to take delight in it; to his nature order, and beauty, and harmony recommend themselves; whilst on the other hand deformity, confusion, and discord are an abomination to him. Now as in the public worship of GOD the sound of the voice is an essential element, what must be the effect if no regard is had to the laws which regulate sound? If a number of persons attempt to speak together without regard to these, discord and confusion must ensue; the effect of which cannot but be wearisome. The public worship of GOD therefore ought to be conducted so that the laws which regulate sound be not contravened. On this natural and reasonable proposition is founded the express injunction of Queen Elizabeth as to the way in which the service should be performed, viz., "*We will that there be a modest*

and distinct song so used in all parts of the common prayers of the Church, that the same may be as plainly understood as if it were read without singing." This is what is meant in the directions of the Prayer Book by the word "say," for it is quite evident from the injunction, that the service was never intended to be "read," as one would read a sermon or a book; but to be "said" in such a manner as to admit of many persons joining together without discord or confusion. It is for this cause that Evening Prayer in the calendar is called "Evensong."

It might be objected here that this injunction and these observations are all very well as regards *cathedrals*, but that they cannot be meant for ordinary congregations in parish churches. But this is not so; the injunction is based on a broad and general principle, and relates to all kinds of *public* worship. Not that the modest parish church will vie with the cathedral in the decorations of its song any more than of its architecture. Yet as one principle may well be observed in the *architecture* of both places, so, unless we love dulness and weariness, must one principle be

observed in the *worship* of both ; the only difference being in the extent to which the principle admits of being carried out.

But is it not very difficult and strange to perform the service thus? Strange it may be, but surely not difficult. On the other hand, if a number of persons were already speaking in the same voice it would be difficult *not* to join in with them. That there are, however, difficulties to be overcome, cannot be disputed, but these are occasioned by timidity and prejudice, not by the thing itself. What I plead for is *Natural*, and what we should do spontaneously, were we really left to ourselves, and nothing can be more certain than that whatever is thus "natural," cannot be really difficult, and would very soon cease to appear strange.

But in order that the divine service be conducted thus, as it should be, in compliance with the laws of reason and nature and Queen Elizabeth's injunction, what must be done? What steps must be taken? First, the minister and the congregation must *understand one another*, and realise the fact, that for the service to be properly done, there must be between them a correspondence in tone of

voice, and an agreement *in time and rythm.* The minister should preserve an even, distinct, modulated sound, such as may most readily be adopted by the people; for but a poor attempt at responding can be expected when no proportion is preserved between the minister and congregation. The voice of the minister should be continued with an even sound, without rising or falling in *pitch,* * if possible, from the beginning to the end of any verse or prayer, the last syllable of which should be slightly sustained, in order that the congregation may the more readily take up the "Amen," or other response, in unison or in harmony with that tone of voice in which the prayer had been uttered. In the "Creed" and in the "LORD'S Prayer," and such other portions of the service as minister and people repeat together, the same tone of voice ought especially to be used, and they should be said with much care and distinctness, the tone manly and dignified.

In the Psalms and Canticles, when not sung, the same rule should be observed.

* At the same time care must be taken not to be sleepy or mechanical in utterance—it is quite necessary to preserve life and spirit and variety—which is of easy attainment without altering the pitch of voice.

Let the minister and people correspond in voice, time, and rythm, and let the voice preserve one sustained sound, the greatest care being taken not to begin *before* the Choir and *to pause at the colon in the middle of each verse*, which point is meant quite as much for the guidance of those who "say" the Psalms as for those who chant or "sing" them. In the title page of the Prayer Book they are expressly referred to as being "pointed as they are to be sung or *said* in churches." This "pointing" is nothing else but the colon in the middle of each verse; and indeed so necessary is it to observe these points in saying the Psalms, that where they are disregarded, it is not only impossible to recognise that singular sweetness of rythm which it is the character of the Psalms so remarkably to possess, but the result must be a confused, indistinct, and discordant murmur of many voices, which is *therefore* in general almost *inaudible*, because if these discordant sounds were made louder, the *noise* would be intolerable.

Such then is the PRINCIPLE *by which the congregational worship of the Church ought to be governed*, and it is incredible what a

solemnity and dignity our public devotions would assume if minister and people would resolutely determine upon being guided thereby; our services would bear on the very face of them order and majesty, the sound would be suited to the words, and would conduce to summon up and to sustain those feelings with which a spiritual worshipper ought to be actuated in all parts of the Common Prayer; nay, when the service is thus performed, it is next to impossible for a devout worshipper to grow weary or dull.

We must now recall attention to the ordinary way in which our public devotions are celebrated. Can any thing be more alien from the principles above laid down? the principles which nature, reason, and the compilers of our services unite in recommending. For what is the fact? In the first place, those parts of the service wherein the whole congregation is expected *audibly* to join, are in many places neglected by the congregation altogether, and left to the hurried and spiritless utterance of the clerk or a few of the congregation, and it is rare to enter *any* church where the responses are made with that due regard to regularity and order and the laws of

sound which *ought* unquestionably to prevail in united worship. If our people offer up their petitions with *one heart*, they do not do so with *one voice*. An *audible* response (except perhaps from the clerk) is scarcely ever heard; the greater part whisper or mutter, some speaking faster, some slower, and if any are more audible than the rest, yet all respect to *time*, *concord*, and *rythm* is utterly lost sight of, each one, apparently, reading out his response without the smallest reference to the congregation *along with whom* he is *supposed* to be responding, forgetful of the social character of the service of our Common Prayer. And nowhere is this seeming want of heart and life more perceptible than in the cold and apathetic "Amen." It would be something if only an attempt were made to restore this *one* often repeated and important response to its due place. There was a time when we are told the "A-men"* of the Christian worshippers shook the very roof of the place which held them; doubtless *they* responded in the same voice, not the *less*

* The first syllable of which should be pronounced *open* as in Father.

heartily, because they did it under the guidance of a rule or system ; on the other hand, this very rule which guided them relieved them from the trammels of disorder and confusion, and *enabled* them to indicate energetically the heart's assent to the prayers and supplications which had been offered up for them by their minister in their hearing.

But it would be not only unjust but absurd to lay the blame of this discordant responding entirely at the doors of the *congregation*. How can they be *expected* to respond aright unless they can have their *minister*, his voice, tone, and manner, to look up to for guidance? And what measure of assistance or guidance do they in general meet with in this respect, from their minister? Absolutely none at all. Most clergymen indeed are, without perhaps being aware of it, a hindrance in this respect rather than a help ; for can it be disputed that nine ministers out of every ten have each his own way of reading the service, which no one else could follow without the appearance of mockery? One seeks to be impressive—another lays great emphasis on certain words—another repeats the service as rapidly as he can—another

preaches the prayers—others have a sing-song way of their own, altering the pitch of their voice half a dozen times in the same prayer—others drop it at every pause, invariably at the end—*hastening* the closing syllables which ought to be *sustained.*

Now what chance is there in any of these cases for the congregation to produce, if they desired it, an united response? The wonder is, *not* that people make the responses so indifferently as they do, but rather, under such circumstances, that they can be prevailed on to respond at all.

In this dull, heavy, uninteresting manner is our public worship ordinarily gone through —*tolerated* rather than enjoyed. What wonder that complaints are made of dulness to the spirits, and weariness to the flesh? For it has been well asked, "Who that has the least ear or feeling for regulated sound, can be otherwise than *distressed* at being, week after week, condemned to listen to the miserable duet between the minister and clerk, repeating the psalms, and hymns, the litany and suffrages, the Confession, the LORD'S prayer, and the Belief, with reference to no principle, with no regard to regularity, oftentimes five or six words apart?" It is

more than *distressing*, it is *grievous* to be compelled to listen to the school children in particular, who are often permitted in GOD'S house, to hurry over these solemn portions of the divine service in a way which would not be tolerated in their school room, but which *is* tolerated in GOD'S house, because the *principle* on which Church worship should be conducted has been so universally lost sight of and neglected.

Is there not then under these circumstances an absolute *call* upon us to do something? Is it not high time to revert to nature and reason, and to conform ourselves to the only *known principles* upon which the service of GOD *can* be reverently, orderly, and solemnly performed? The time is not far distant, let us hope, when the clergy, as a body, will feel the truth which these remarks have dwelt upon; and *then* when they have become persuaded, let them by degrees endeavour to conform *themselves* to the rules laid down. Let them observe as nearly as possible one tone of voice throughout a prayer; let them be *deliberate* and *even* in reciting the psalms, litany, and suffrages, *observing the colons*. The transition from their own way to the *right way*, will thus be easy

and almost imperceptible, for it must not be supposed requisite, in order to act upon the principle in question, to repeat the service with that *decided musical recitation* observed in cathedrals, which is only suited to an organised choir ; on the other hand, it is more proper in ordinary parish churches to speak in the natural tone of voice, only minding to preserve it firm, even, dignified and sustained.* When this point has been attained, then let the clerk and the children† be trained to respond in accordance with the minister—this will soon attract those members of the congregation, who have an ear, to join in, and in no very long time the whole congregation (the author speaks from his own experience) will respond, if not in the *same tone*, yet harmoniously—and in the same time, preserving the proper rythm and accent.

And note, that every member of a parish choir ought to consider himself quite as much responsible for assisting in this depart-

---

* The feelings ought to be expressed by allowing the voice to dwell slightly on emphatic syllables—not by a rise or fall in the pitch.

† See note at foot of page 4.

ment as in the singing. There will be some bashfulness, and hesitation, it may be, to overcome at first, but which a very little pains and perseverance will subdue.

It was not the object of these pages to enter into the question of *chanting* the psalms, or singing the litany and suffrages to the time-honored cadences which have been from the earliest ages set to them, and which have never altered. Great facilities are now provided for the more general attainment of these helps to devotion and praise.

We conclude by repeating that if we could but return to the *good old way*, the effect would be felt in quarters where we should least expect it, and the service would be frequented by many who had hitherto despised or neglected it, repelled by the negligent, hurried, cold, spiritless, discordant, and therefore uninviting manner in which our divine worship is now for the most part performed. The author has purposely confined himself to the more humble effort of pleading for an united response, on the broad ground, that it is useless to attempt to fly before we have learned to walk.

ROWSELL & ELLIS, PRINTERS, KING STREET, TORONTO.